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August

Polygamy

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The choice for us, therefore, is not between monogamy and polygamy, but rather the lawful polygamy of Islam or the illicit polygamy of non-Islamic peoples.

One of the commandments given in the Qur'an as a matter of social organization concerns polygamy, that is permission for a man to marry up to four women:

If you fear that you cannot treat orphans with fairness, then you may marry such women (widowed) as seem good to you: two, three or four of them. But if you fear that you cannot do justice, marry one only (4:3).

This verse was revealed after the Battle of Uhud (Shawwal 3 AH) in which seventy Muslims were martyred. Suddenly, seventy homes in Medina were bereft of all male members, and the question now arose as to how all these widows and orphans were to be cared for. This was an acute social problem. It was solved by the revelation of this verse asking the people who could afford it to take care of the orphans, by marrying the widows and keeping their orphaned children under their guardianship.

The background and wording of this verse appear to express a commandment which should be only temporary in effect. That is to say that it applied only to a particular state of emergency when, due to losses of men in battle, the number of women exceeded the number of available men. But the Qur'an, despite its having been revealed at a particular time and place, is universal in its application. One of the great characteristics of the Qur'an is that it describes eternal realities, with reference to temporal issues, this commandment being typical of this special quality of the Qur'an.

One point greatly in need of clarification is that in the matter of marrying more than one woman, the initiative does not lie solely with any individual man. There is always the condition—an inescapable one—that whatever the society, the women should outnumber the men. Suppose the earth were inhabited by one thousand million people out of which 500 million were men and 500 million were women. It would not then be possible in such a situation for a man to have more than one wife. A second, third or fourth wife would be obtainable only by force. But in Islam, a forced marriage is not considered lawful. According to the *Shari'ah*, the willingness of the bride-to-be is a compulsory condition.

Looked at from a practical angle, the above commandment of the Qur'an can be complied with only if that particular situation exists in society which existed in Medina after the Battle of Uhud – that is, there is a disproportion in the ratio of men and women. In the absence of such a situation, the commandment of the Qur'an would be inapplicable. But studies of human society and its history have shown that the situation in ancient Medina was not one which existed only at a particular point in time. It is a situation which has almost always been prevalent throughout the entire world. That situation of emergency is, in fact, the general situation of mankind. This commandment is yet another proof of God's omniscience. His commandment, seemingly elicited by an emergency, became an eternal commandment for the whole of our world.

The Inequality in Numbers

Records show that male and female births are almost equal in number. But a study of mortality shows that the rate is higher for men than for women. This disparity is in evidence from early childhood to extreme old age. According to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1984): "In general, the risk of death at any given age is less for females than for males" (VII/37).

The proportionately higher numbers of women in society can be traced to a variety of causes. For instance, when war breaks out, the majority of the casualties are men. In the First World War (1914-18) about 8 million soldiers were killed. Most of the civilians killed were also men. In the Second World War (1939-45) about 60 million people were either killed or maimed for life, most of these were men. In the Iraq-Iran war alone (1979-1988) 82 thousand Iranian women and about hundred thousand Iraqi women were widowed. All in the space of ten years.

Another drain on the availability of men in society is imprisonment. In the USA, the most civilized society of modern times, less than 1,300,000 people are convicted daily for one crime or another. A number of them—97% of whom are men—are obliged to serve lengthy prison sentences.

The modern industrial system too is responsible for the lower proportion of men in society, death by accident having become a matter of daily routine in present times. There is no country in which accidents do not take place every day on the streets, in the factories and wherever sophisticated, heavy machinery is handled by human beings. In this modern industrial age, such accidents are so on the increase that a whole new discipline has come into being – safety engineering. According to data collected in 1967, in that year a total of 1,75,000 people died as the result of accidents in fifty different countries. Most of these were men.

In spite of safety engineering, casualties from industrial accidents have increased. For instance, the number of air accidents in 1988 was higher than ever before. Similarly, experimentation in arsenals continue to kill people in all industrialized countries. But the death toll is never made public. Here again, it is men who have the highest casualty rate.

For reasons of this nature, women continue to outnumber men. This difference persists in even the most developed societies, e.g. in America. According to data collected in 1967, there were nearly 71,00000 more women than men. This means that even if every single man in America got married, 71,00000 women would be left without husbands.

We give below the data of several western countries to show the ratio of men to women. (Figures taken from the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1984)

	COUNTRY	MALE	FEMALE
1.	Austria	47.7%	52.93%
2.	Burma	48.81	51.19
3.	Germany	48.02	51.89
4.	France	48.99	51.01
5.	Italy	48.89	51.01
6.	Poland	48.61	51.39
7.	Spain	48.94	51.06
8.	Switzerland	48.67	51.33
9.	Soviet Union	46.59	53.03
10.	United States	48.58	51.42

The Willingness of Women

The presence of greater numbers of women in a society is not the only pre-requisite for polygamy. It is, in addition, compulsory that the woman who is the object of the man's choice should be willing to enter into the married state. This willingness on the woman's part is a must before a marriage can be lawful in Islam. It is unlawful to marry a woman by force. There is no example in the history of Islam where a man has been allowed to force a woman into marriage.

The Prophet's own view that "an unmarried girl should not be married until her permission has been taken" has been recorded by both Bukhari and Muslim. Abdullah ibn Abbas, one of the Prophet's Companions and a commentator on the Quran, narrates the story of a girl who came to the Prophet complaining that her father had married her off against her wishes. The Prophet gave her the choice of either remaining within the bonds of wedlock or of freeing herself from them. (Abu Dawood)

Another such incident narrated by Abdullah ibn Abbas concerns a woman called Bareera and her husband, Mughees, who was a black slave. Abdullah ibn Abbas tells the story as if it were all happening before his very eyes. "Mughees is following Bareera through the paths of Medina. He is crying and his

tears are running down his beard. Seeing him, the Prophet said to me, 'O Abbas, are you not surprised at Mughees' love for Bareera and Bareera's hate for Mughees?' Then the prophet said to Bareera, 'I wish you would take him back.' Bareera said to the Prophet, 'Is that a command?' The Prophet replied, 'No, it is only a recommendation.' Then Bareera said, 'I don't need your recommendation'. But if it had been a command, she would have obeyed the Prophet.

There was an interesting case of polygamy which took place during the Caliphate of Umar Farooq. A certain widow, Umm Iban bint Utbah had four suitors for marriage. All four – Umar bin Al Khattab, Ali ibn Talib, Zubayr and Talha – were already married. Umm Iban accepted the proposal of marriage made by Talha and, of course, refused the other three, whereupon she was married to Talha.

This happened in Medina, the capital of the Islamic State. Among the rejected suitors was the reigning Caliph. But no one expressed even surprise or dismay, the reason being that in Islam, a woman is completely free to make her own decisions. This is a right that no one can take away from her – not even the ruler of the day.

These incidents show that the Islamic Commandments giving permission to marry up to four women does not mean having the right to seize four women and shut them up inside one's home. Marriage is a matter of mutual consent. Only that woman can be made a second or a third wife who is willing to be so. And when this matter rests wholly on the willingness of the woman, there is no cause for objection.

The present age gives great importance to freedom of choice. This value is fully supported by Islamic Law. On the other hand, the upholders of "feminism" want to turn freedom of choice into restriction of choice.

The Solution to a problem Rather than a Commandment

The above discussion makes it clear that the different in numbers of men and women is a permanent problem existing in both war and peace. Now the question arises as to how to solve this problem. What should those women do to satisfy their natural urges? When they have failed to find a husband in a monogamous society? And how are they to secure an honourable life in that society?

One way – hallowed in Indian tradition – is for widows to burn themselves to death, so that neither they nor their problems survive. The alternative is to allow themselves to be turned out of their homes on to the streets. The state of Hindu society resulting from adherence to this principle can be judged from a detailed report published in *India Today* (November 15, 1987), entitled; "Widows: Wrecks of Humanity."

Now there is no need to discuss this further, because it is unconceivable that in present times any sensible person would advocate this as a solution.

The other possible 'solution' to be found in the 'civilized' society of the west is the conversion of unwillingness to become a second wife into willingness to become a mistress, often of more than one man.

During the Second World War in which several western countries such as Germany, France, Britain, etc. took part, a large number of men were killed. As a result, women far outnumbered men at the end of the hostilities. Permissiveness then became the order of the day, to the extent that boards with such inscriptions as 'Wanted,,: A Guest for the Evening' could be seen outside the homes of husbandless women. This state of affairs persisted in western countries in various forms, even long after the war, and is now largely prevalent because of industrial and mechanical accidents.

Unlawful Polygamy

People who would outlaw polygamy have to pay the price. That is, they are forced to tolerate men and women having illicit relations, which is surely a much more unsavoury state of affairs. Failure to control a natural process whereby the male population dwindles, leaving 'surplus' women, coupled with the outlawing of polygamy, has given rise to the evil of the 'Mistress' (defined by Webster's Dictionary as "a woman who has sexual intercourse with and, often, is supported by a man for a more or less extended period of time without being married to him; paramour). This, in effect, sets up a system of illegal polygamy.

The system of keeping a mistress is prevalent in all those countries, including India, where there are legal constraints on polygamy, or where polygamy is looked down upon socially. In such a situation, the real problem is not whether or not to adopt polygamy. The real problem of surplus women in society can be solved only by polygamy, whether we choose to consider it legal or not.

The Islamic Way

The solution to this problem in the Islamic *Shari'ah* is the giving of permission to men, under special conditions, to marry more than one woman. This principle of polygamy as enshrined in the Islamic *Shari'ah*, is designed, in actual fact, to save women from the ignoble consequences mentioned above. This commandment, although apparently general in application, was given only as a solution to a specific social problem. It provides an arrangement whereby surplus women may save themselves from sexual anarchy and have a proper, stable family life. That is to say, it is not a question of adopting polygamy rather than monogamy. The choice is between polygamy and sexual anarchy.

If the commandment to practice polygamy is seen in the abstract, it would appear to be biased in favour of men. But when placed in the context of social organization, it is actually in favour of women. Polygamy is both a proper and a natural solution to women's problems.

The permission to practice polygamy in Islam was not given in order to enable men to satisfy their sexual urges. It was designed as a practical strategy to solve a particular problem. Marrying more than one woman is possible only when there are more women than men. Failing this, it is out of the question. Is it conceivable that Islam, just to satisfy man's desires, would give us a commandment which is neither possible nor practical?

The Encyclopaedia Britannica (1984) aptly concludes that one reason for adopting polygamy is the surplus of women. Among most peoples who permit or prefer it, the large majority of men live in a state of monogamy because of the limited number of women (VIII/97).

To have more than one wife is not an ideal in Islam. It is, in essence, a practical solution to a social problem.

Conclusion

In terms of the birth rate, men and women are almost equal in number. But subsequently, for a variety of reasons, the number of men in society decreases, leaving an excess of women. Now the question arises as to what should be the solution to this problem. In view of the inevitability of this imbalance, how is a healthy relationship between the sexes to be established?

By forming the principle of monogamy, hundreds of thousands of women fail to find husbands for themselves and are thus denied an honourable place in society. Monogamy as an absolute principle may seem pleasing to some, but events show that this is not fully practicable in the world of today. The choice for us, therefore, is not between monogamy and polygamy, but rather the lawful polygamy of Islam or the illicit polygamy of non-Islamic peoples.

The latter system leaves 'surplus' women to lead lives of sexual anarchy and social destruction. The former, on the other hand permits them to opt of their own free will for marriage with anyone who can give fair treatment to more than one wife.

Of the above two possible systems, the Islamic world has chosen polygamy and the non-Islamic monogamy. We leave it to the readers to decide which is the more proper and more honourable.

9 August 1989

Having bad relations with anyone is no reason to deny him his rights.

Umer ibn Khattab once told a certain person that he had no love for him. "But will you deprive me of my rights?" asked the man. Umer said that he would not. "That is enough for me; it is only women who need to be loved," replied the man.

9 August 1989

How saint-worship gradually turns into idol-worship

Several idols which were worshipped by Noah's people – Wood, Suva, Yaghuth, Yauq and Nasr—are mentioned in the Quran. Ibn Jareer al Tabari has related a tradition on the authority of Mohammad Ibn Qays to the effect that these idols were named after certain saints of ancient times. These were pious men who had lived in the period between Adam and Noah. They had many followers in their lifetime, and when they died these followers said if they were to construct images of their heroes, it would inspire them in their worship of God. They then proceeded to do so. When the next generation made its appearance, Satan introduced another idea: that their forefathers had not just been using these statues as a focus of worship—they had actually been worshipping them as idols. It was these idols who made the rain fall and, in fact, accomplished everything. That was how idol worship started.

(Ibn Kathir, *Tafseer*)

Why She Chose Islam

The message of the Adhan was powerful. It hit my heart like a bolt of lightening. This is what sparked my interest in Islam. From then on I read Islamic books, attended conferences on Islam, and studied the Quran with other sisters. Al-hamdulillah, Allah subhanahu wa ta'ala, has blessed me with Islam. My thirst has finally been quenched. My entire view of life has been transformed, and I have been blessed with so much peace and happiness.

I am an American woman – former high fashion model – born and raised in California. I was brought up as a Catholic and attended Catholic schools all of my life. But even as a child, I rebelled against the teaching of the Catholic Church and yearned for the Truth.

I can recall an incident when I was five. I was told that due to my refusal to bow down to kiss the statue of Jesus, I would end up in Hell. My refusal to worship the statue was interpreted by my parents as pride. But in reality, I did not associate deity to a statue.

My family misunderstanding of my spiritual philosophy made me feel like an outcast. I imagine that this was very difficult for my family as well, since they are all devout Catholics. My Catholic upbringing made me feel quite confused because it did not make any sense to me. However, this made me more determined to search for the truth. I prayed for God's guidance.

I began my search by studying various religions. I read many religious books day and night. I attended religious retreats and Bible study classes. Yet I was not satisfied. I continued to pray for guidance. At that time I had not heard of Islam, until one day I found myself in a Muslim country, the United Arab Emirates. A woman from Abu Dhabi had undergone surgery in Los Angeles and I was asked to accompany her back to her country. I knew nothing of Islam at the time, nor did I know any Arabic. I was literally struck when I heard the *Adhan* (the call for prayer) for the first time.

“Rosanna come to me, for I am the truth and what you have been looking for.”

The message of the *Adhan* was powerful. It hit my heart like a bolt of lightening. This is what sparked my interest in Islam. From then on I read Islamic books, attended conferences on Islam, and studied the Quran with other sisters. *Al-hamdulillah*, Allah, *subhanahu wa ta'ala*, has blessed me with Islam. My thirst has finally been quenched. My entire view of life has been transformed, and I have been blessed with so much peace and happiness.

My prayer is answered and my confusion and struggle since childhood have vanished. Now I'm proud to say that I am a Muslim. I also wear the *hijab* (Islamic clothing). No longer do I dress in a fashion to please the world – only Allah.

May Allah bless all of those who were instrumental in teaching me Islam. May Allah give Abu Dhabi a special blessing for it was there that Islam was introduced to me. In conclusion *La Ilaha illallah Muhammad Rasulallah*.

Rosanna De La Torre

Marina Del Rey, California.

(Courtesy: *Islamic Horizons*, USA)

11 August 1989

It is the spirit of worship that is important:

According to Ibn Umer, the Prophet once said that a man might pray, pay the poor due and go on pilgrimage – and he went on to mention all the virtuous actions—but that he would be rewarded only according to the degree of his intellectual awareness of what he did.

(Ahmad, *Musnad*)

A Question of Attitudes

When I was in Moradabad in May, 1983, I made two speeches, one on religious obligations, and the other on the building up of the community. When the latter speech was over, a member of the audience seemingly an educated person – raised two issues, the first of which was that whatever I had said on the subject of community building was concerned exclusively with causes. But the experience of Moradabad had little in common with what might have seemed to be parallel situation. In the latter stages of the Moradabad riots in 1980, the Muslims were so tightly encircled that there was no possible escape route. At that point there was no remedy but prayer. All of the Muslims then joined in prayers, whereupon there ensued a miraculous change in the situation, and peace prevailed in the city. The questioner's second point was that if the whole matter rested on causes, then, this being so, all Muslims and non-Muslims were equal. How then could Muslims lay claim to any distinction as a community?

In answer to the first question, I pointed out that what I had said concerned the common law (Quran 13:11) and that what the questioner had said concerned the law on situation of distress (*iztirar*), or emergency, (Quran 27:62). There is no doubt about it that when an individual, or a group, feels trapped in a situation from which there is apparently no escape, and calls upon God from the very heart, then God does come to the rescue (Joseph, 22-23). But, as is clear from the Quran, God's help in times of distress is not confined only to Muslims but may be given to anyone who needs it. We cannot, therefore, derive laws of general application from particular situation of distress.

What I said applied to the situation before the riot had broken out. And what the questioner said related to what took place after the riot had spread. The post-riot situation – a situation of emergency – is an entirely separate issue. And then, what steps should be taken to keep the atmosphere from reaching the inflammable stage is again a wholly different question.

May I say that in modern times Muslims have lost their traditional fortitude: they allow themselves to be provoked by very minor considerations. It is this attitude of intolerance which is the real cause of all riots. So long as this attitude goes unrectified, no conceivable strategy can put an end to rioting. For example, Muslims wanted the Aligarh Muslim University to have a minority character and, to that end, fought a legal battle directed against the government, which went on for 25 years. Finally, an act was passed in 1982 conceding their point. But Muslims are still fighting. Whereas, originally, the target of their attack was New Delhi, now it is the Muslims' own Vice-Chancellor of A.M.U.

Many years prior to this, the majority of the Indian Muslims had demanded that the country be partitioned, their greatest argument in support of this demand being that they suffered prejudicial treatment at the hands of the majority community. It is now a matter of history that their demands were acceded to and they were given a separate homeland – Pakistan. But their paranoid mentality found a

new target at which to direct their grievances, with East Pakistanis complaining that West Pakistan was unfair and biased in its treatment of them. This resulted in a bloody civil war which was brought to an end only when East Pakistan was separated from West Pakistan. The events of 1983 show, however, that the actual problem still continues. Now it is the turn of the Sindhi Muslims to voice the same complaint against the Punjabi Muslims. This battle is an ongoing affair, and no one can foretell exactly when it is going to end.

If the truth were told, the actual problem afflicting Indian Muslims is their own intolerance on every conceivable issue. So long as they persist in this attitude, they can expect to be given a rough passage by their contemporaries, whether in this, or in any other country.

Replying to the second question, I said that in so far as their being the appointed messengers of God is concerned, Muslims are undoubtedly a 'chosen' community and, as such, are deserving of distinctive treatment by God, who has made a promise of special succour for Muslims – a promise which He has not made to others. But Muslims can prove themselves worthy of this divine blessing only if they actually carry out the responsibilities which devolve upon a 'chosen' community. It is not enough just to be born Muslims.

Their most important duty is that of *dawah*, and they should have it clear in their minds that *dawah* does not mean working for the reform of Muslims, but conveying the true religion of God to non-Muslims. Striving to reform Muslims is doubtless a worthy task, and it certainly must be performed, but in itself, this does not entitle the faithful to God's promised divine succour to those engaged in true *dawah* work. This promise of God will be fulfilled only when the real imperatives of *dawah* work among non-Muslims have been dealt with in a thoroughly satisfactory manner.

The Thousand Mile Journey

Nation-building cannot be effected just by “epoch-making speeches.” It is only epochmaking actions which will produce the desired results. If the community is to become a solid fortress, it must be built with solid stones and not with verbose speeches and far-fetched poetic diction.

There is a proverb in Chinese which runs: “A thousand mile journey begins with one step”. That is, no matter how far you have to go, you cannot reach your destination unless you take that first step. And then only by going step by step will you reach your goal. It is not possible to arrive at the final destination by making one giant leap.

This is generally accepted fact of life, and is relevant to the community as well as to the individual. No journey, whether undertaken by an individual or a community, can succeed unless this principle is adhered to.

You may set out to earn one million rupees, but, in the beginning, you shall have to be content with earning your money rupee by rupee. Similarly, if you want to qualify for a post graduate degree, you will do well to work hard right from the junior most class in school. If you have the ambition to become a writer there is no avoiding long preliminary periods of study and research. If you want to see a building of your own rise high into the sky, you still have to start with the foundations.

The same is true of the construction of a community. National-building cannot be effected just by “epoch-making speeches.” It is only epoch-making action which will produce the desired results. If the community is to become a solid fortress, it must be built with solid stones and not with verbose speeches and far-fetched poetic diction.

Without exception, the Muslim leaders of the present day began their movement with some giant leap. This was quite wrong. The right way was to begin by arousing awareness and uncovering intellectual potential. In spite of the great hue and cry they have made about their work, nothing of a result-oriented nature has been achieved. The work of the building of the community must begin from intellectual construction and rectification. The first practical steps cannot be effectively taken without this.

The greatest reason for Muslim disarray at the present movement is this criminal neglect of basic priorities on the part of their own leaders.

15 August 1989

Good Character—the very essence of religion

Abdur Rehman ibn Harith ibn Abi Mirdas As Sulami recounts what happened one day when he was in the presence of the Prophet, along with a group of people. The Prophet asked for some water to be brought, then dipping his hands into it, he performed his ablutions. Whatever water was left was drunk by the people present. “What made you do this?” enquired the Prophet. “Love of God and the Prophet,” they replied. “If you wish to be loved by God and His Prophet,” God’s messenger told them, “be faithful when trusted and honest in your speech; and be a good neighbour to others.”

(Al-Tabarani)

Two Levels of Moral Deficiency

If one's skin becomes dirty, being on the outer surface of the body, it can easily be washed clean. But if some malady develops, deep within the body, no amount of water will wash it away. Religious matters are on an exact parallel, in the sense that if one's religious life becomes contaminated in some superficial way, there is always the hope of God's forgiveness. But if the corruption runs deeper, permeating one's entire soul, there can be little expectation of divine mercy.

Let us consider the moral condition of a man who commits an evil deed against his own better judgement. His conscience never ceases to prick him, he becomes disgusted with himself and his feeling of self-abhorrence begins to abate only when he turns to God to seek His forgiveness and to ask for His protection from Satan. The inward state of such an individual is proof that it is only his external being which has been affected by his sin. His wrongdoing has not permeated his soul. Such a man is like one whose body has been smeared with dirt, but whose inner self has escaped defilement. His soul is still in a healthy state, for God has promised that He will cleanse such people of their sins, thus making them fit to enter the pure world of Paradise.

Now, let us consider the state of those whose very souls have become contaminated by their own unremitting wickedness. Their misconduct – the result of evil premeditation – is far from signifying a temporary lapse: it has a sustained deliberateness of purpose about it which feeds on such negative emotions as jealousy, hate, pride, vengeance and contumacy. Such wrongdoers are in the grip, not just of a superficial disorder, but of a deep-seated lingering malaise which taints the very roots of their being. There is no hope of their being purified by God. Having reached this abysmal level of sin, they are fit only for the flames of Hell.

The minor and infrequent offenders of the first category are people who take themselves to task in this world so that they should be spared the wrath of God in the life after death. Members of the second category, however having avoided introspection and self-appraisal in the life of this world, will still bear the stains of their guilt when they are brought before their Maker on the Last Day of Judgement. At that fatal moment, there will be no escape for them from the terrible punishment of the Almighty.

17 August 1989

Of all actions, the most sublime is remembrance of God

Abu Darda reports the Prophet as asking his companions: "Should I not tell you of the action that is best and most pure in the presence of your Lord; the action which will raise you up in the sight of God, and is better for you than great expenditure of gold and silver; better too than that you should meet your enemies in battle, striking their necks and they striking yours?" "Do tell us," the Companions replied, "It is remembrance of God," said the Prophet.

(Al-Tirmidhi)

The preacher of God's word wishes people well, no matter how they treat him

The Prophet besieged Taif for more than twenty days. When it became difficult for the Muslims to continue with the siege, he ordered them to withdraw. It was then suggested that the Prophet bring down a curse upon the heads of the Thaqeef tribe, but the Prophet merely raised both hands and prayed: "Lord, guide the Thaqeef, and bring them into the fold of Islam." The Prophet was likewise told of the contumacy and disbelief of the Daus tribe, and again it was suggested that he should invoke a curse upon them, but the Prophet's response was again to pray. "Lord, guide the Daus," he begged, "and bring them into the fold of the faithful."

Man's Natural Shield

In 1973, there were about 1800 tigers in the jungles of India. Then a plan called 'Project Tiger' was worked out to protect the species and increase its numbers, so that now there are more than 4,000. This increase in the number of tigers, however, has also increased the danger to other animals and to human beings. In the national park, situation in the jungle area of eastern UP and the Sundarban park situated between India and Bangladesh; the tigers often come out of the jungles and kill the villagers' cattle.

It is seldom, however, that the tiger attacks man. Even when it does so, it attacks from the rear. This is because the tiger fears the human face. According to a report published in the Times of India (December 11, 1988) "those who do enter the buffer zone of the Sunderbans wear masks on the backs of their heads because a tiger seldom attacks a man from the front."

Man's face has been gifted by nature with the capacity to inspire awe. The tiger, thus intimidated by man's face, does not dare to attack him. It will attack him only if in some way he shows himself the weaker of the two, and, in fact, a tiger becomes a man-eater only when a human hunter wounds him without killing him.

The awe inspired by man's face serves as a check not only to animals but also to other ill-intentioned human beings. Man, by nature, remains in awe of the faces of other men. This feeling of awe is dissipated only when some external happening upsets what is, after all, a natural state of affairs.

There is a *hadith* which says, "God created Adam in His own form." This saying may not be quite authentic in respect of its chain of narrators, but it is true in meaning. It is a fact that human face is the most impressive thing in the whole universe. It has a certain grandeur to it.

God has made of your face and your personality an invincible shield, which you may bring into play on all occasions. Your success in moments of adversity will then depend upon what image of yourself you have projected – how you appear in others' eyes.

If you are pictured as a superficial, worthless person, someone ready to pick a quarrel at the slightest provocation, raising slogans about moving forward, while all the time in retreat, your appears will carry no weight with friends and enemies alike. You will be like a broken shield which can afford no protection to others.

However, if others picture you as a man of iron, a man of high principles, when you come before them, they will yield pride of place to you. Your very appearance will suggest the words, "He came, he saw, he conquered."

The human face is an awe-inspiring shield. You will be attacked only if you are foolish enough to show your adversary that you are the weaker of the two. Wisdom lies in continually commanding respect, and then no one will dare to harm you.

19 August 1989

The law of God is applicable to everyone.

It is written in the chapter of the Quran entitled, "The Table Spread," that those who do not judge in accordance with God's revelations are unbelievers, transgressors and evil-doers, the reference being to the Children of Israel. Someone suggested to Hudhaifah, a companion of the Prophet, that as these verses had been revealed with regard to the Children of Israel, they did not apply to Muslims, and that what they meant was that those of the Jews who did not judge in accordance with God's revelations were unbelievers, transgressors and evil-doers. "What good brothers you have in the Children of Israel that they should accept all that is sour, leaving all that is sweet for you in life," replied Hudhaifah. "It cannot be as you say. God knows, you are bound to follow in their footsteps."

The Cause of Poverty

Historical records show that during Muslim rule India was very prosperous. It was during British rule that, for the first time, it became poor. After freedom, under home rule, it became still poorer. Even now poverty is on the increase.

Just over a century ago, during the days of British rule, an English officer by the name of W. W. Hunter, observed in the course of a speech which he made in London that "at this time India is facing a basic problem. And that is the problem of the poverty of the people." He said that we must give thought to how India, which was once held to be so rich, now proved to be so poor. (News item in the *Times of India*, December 4, 1880, reproduced in the *Times of India* supplement, Society, November-December, 1988, p. 34.)

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The reason is that the wealth acquired from the country by the old Muslim rulers was spent within the country. Thus the wealth of the country continued to flow inwards. The British, on the contrary, took country's wealth abroad, so that the country's prosperity started draining away. This is the real reason for India having prospered during Muslim rule and having become impoverished during British rule.

This process of the outward circulation of money is still going on a large scale in "Free India." The indigenous rulers of India, business magnates and industrialists are taking the country's wealth away to deposit in European and American banks.

Likewise smuggling, which is the biggest business of present-day India, is transmitting huge amounts of wealth to foreign countries. In this way, the wealth of which India is at present being deprived, is greater even than that appropriated by the British throughout the entire period of their rule.

National Integration

National integration, a goal which all communities should strive towards has been the subject of ongoing debates for many years now in different parts of the country. I myself have had the opportunity to participate in several seminars devoted to this subject during the past one year. One which, to my mind, carried considerable weight, was the All India Seminar on “National Unity and Religious Minorities of India”. This was held on the 11th and 12th of February, 1989 under the auspices of the Bharat Vikas Parishad (founded in 1969 in New Delhi), its patron and president being respectively Dr L.M. Singhvi and Justice H.R. Khanna. My own contribution was a paper on the above topic, specially written for the closing session.

Naive Thinking

In contrast to the strong feeling and clear-cut ideas of the intellectuals on this subject, there is a great deal of vague and muddled thinking on the part of the people, the majority of whom pronounce themselves in favour of change of system, or changes in the law. For instance, it has been suggested that the words ‘minority rights’ in the Constitution of India should be replaced by human rights’. And the Minorities Commission should be replaced by a ‘Human Commission’.

The implication is that the very inclusion of the phrase ‘minority right’ in our Constitution perpetuates the idea of separatism and leads to a hardening of communal attitudes, leaving the field open, as it does, to claims for separate rights for every group. On the contrary, if the phrase human rights were inserted in the Constitution, all of India’s inhabitants would appear as one. The concept of separatism would then disappear, making way for a general atmosphere of unity.

This is clearly an oversimplification. The truth is that the problem calls for a change, not in the wording of official documents, *but in the present state of affairs*. If there are thorns in the world of rose bushes, and you would like to get rid of them, there is no way that you can do so simply by eliminating the word ‘thorn’ from the dictionary of bushes and replacing it with the word ‘flower’. The saying, ‘No rose without a thorn’ should convince us that we have to accept our rose bush as it is – thorns and all. That is, we must see the actuality of the problem, find concrete solutions for it and stop depending on word-play.

Another ‘solution’ which is offered to the communal problem is that whenever an incident takes place, the Government should resort to police action and court proceedings. Our leaders without exception, are the first to lay emphasis on this.

It has to be conceded that, in principle, this task is part of the duties of the administration and that certainly, the latter must carry out its duties. But to imagine that the administration on its own can solve this problem is to misunderstand the complexity of the issue. Administrative measures, even when utterly sincere in intention, can be only a partial and temporary solution to the problem.

Those who discuss the communal problem almost invariably make the fundamental error of thinking of the North as if it were the whole of India. They forget the very vital distinction between North India and South India – an omission which causes their analyses and proffered solutions to go seriously awry. It is a matter of historical record that over the past half century, all of the communal riots have taken place in North India. No rioting has ever taken place in the South. And if, incidentally, there has been a communal riot in South India, it has been found that its instigators came from the North. The South Indians themselves have never been involved in such riots, yet—and this is quite remarkable—all of the divergent views held by different groups are to be found there in the same measure as in North India.

This would appear to mean that the problem so desperately in need of solution in North India has already been solved, in practice, in South India. This being so, we must first of all study what makes the two regions so different from each other. Once this is established all we have to do is 'extend' South India to North India. What is healthy in its influence in one part of the country should be spread without delay to the remaining parts.

On various trips that I have made to the South, I have tried to pinpoint the differences. The most important of these, I found was the tolerance which South Indians have for others – a virtue completely lacking in North Indians. Where the latter are ready to clash the moment that they differ, the South Indians in the same situation show the utmost restraint. Where the intolerance of the North leads to rioting, the tolerance of the South ensures social harmony. It is ultimately a question of differing mentalities.

The above analysis shows where the solution lies. It lies in disseminating whatever factors have proved beneficial in one part of the country in all the other parts. This ultimately means fostering such a mentality as will enable people to lead their lives in communal unity, in spite of any differences they may have.

Encouraging people to think along the right lines is the only way to produce a lasting solution to a problem, which, for North India, has really arisen because of distorted thinking. It is the inability to see and think clearly which is the root cause of much of the social malaise of the present day.

In any society, the existence of various communities is but natural. The real evil in our society, however, is not their existence, but the non-existence of mutual tolerance.

The Need for Tolerance

Differences at various levels in society are inherent in character, and you simply cannot bulldoze them into uniformity. Even Stalin, the Russian dictator, did not succeed in establishing a classless society, although he crushed 25 million people in the attempt. Trying to banish disparities is like trying to achieve the impossible. The only practicable solution to this problem is to inculcate in the people the spirit of tolerance and the positive will to bear with one another. They desperately need to be taught the lesson of unity in diversity. If national unity is to be achieved, it must be in the face of all differences, for the elimination of all differences from society is simply inconceivable.

If we are to imbue people with the spirit of tolerance, we have to adopt the same process of 'permeation' as was advocated by the Fabian society. This would entail lengthy campaigns to improve their present understanding of the subject; it would mean, in fact, attempting to change them from within by filling their minds with correct ideas.

The phrases 'national unity' and 'national integration' have been in use in this country for the last half century, but no real attempt has been made to achieve either of these closely allied goals. It should be obvious that these are not goals that can be attained in a desultory way by holding conferences and parading in the streets with placards. It is only a continuous, vigorous campaign which will raise the consciousness of the people. Up till now, not one of those who raise the slogans of national integration has devoted himself wholeheartedly to this task.

Today, with hundreds of journals and newspapers being brought out in our country, journalism has a great role to play in this intellectual revolution. But not a single journal or newspaper is devoted to this cause. All our newspapers are, in effect, political papers, while the weeklies and fortnightlies are solely concerned with publishing sensational articles for cheap monetary gains. When what ought to be institutions of consciousness-raising have sunk to this level, no benefit is to be gained by issuing occasional appeals.

The truth is that the public cannot be changed unless the leaders first change themselves. Even if only one per cent of the writers and speakers in our country who have a formative influence on public opinion were ready to make the same sacrifice as was made by the Fabians between the first and second world wars (i.e. keeping a low profile, avoiding sensationalism and working for the public good behind the scenes) our country certainly be changed for the better.

Pandit Motile Nehru was once asked when the people would actually have the freedom for which he was struggling. He answered, "I do not know the time but I know that if I lay down my life on this path, then the fortress of freedom will surely be constructed on my dead body."

I would repeat that even if only one per cent of the intellectuals of our country were to involve themselves fully in the campaign of consciousness-raising, their forfeiture of any personal gain would be offset many times over by the new and surging vitality which their sacrifice would give to the nation.

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A good deed is of no value if it makes one proud

Ibn Attalla As Secondary wrote in his book, *Al-Hiram*: "A sin which makes one meek and humble is better than a good deed which makes one proud and arrogant."